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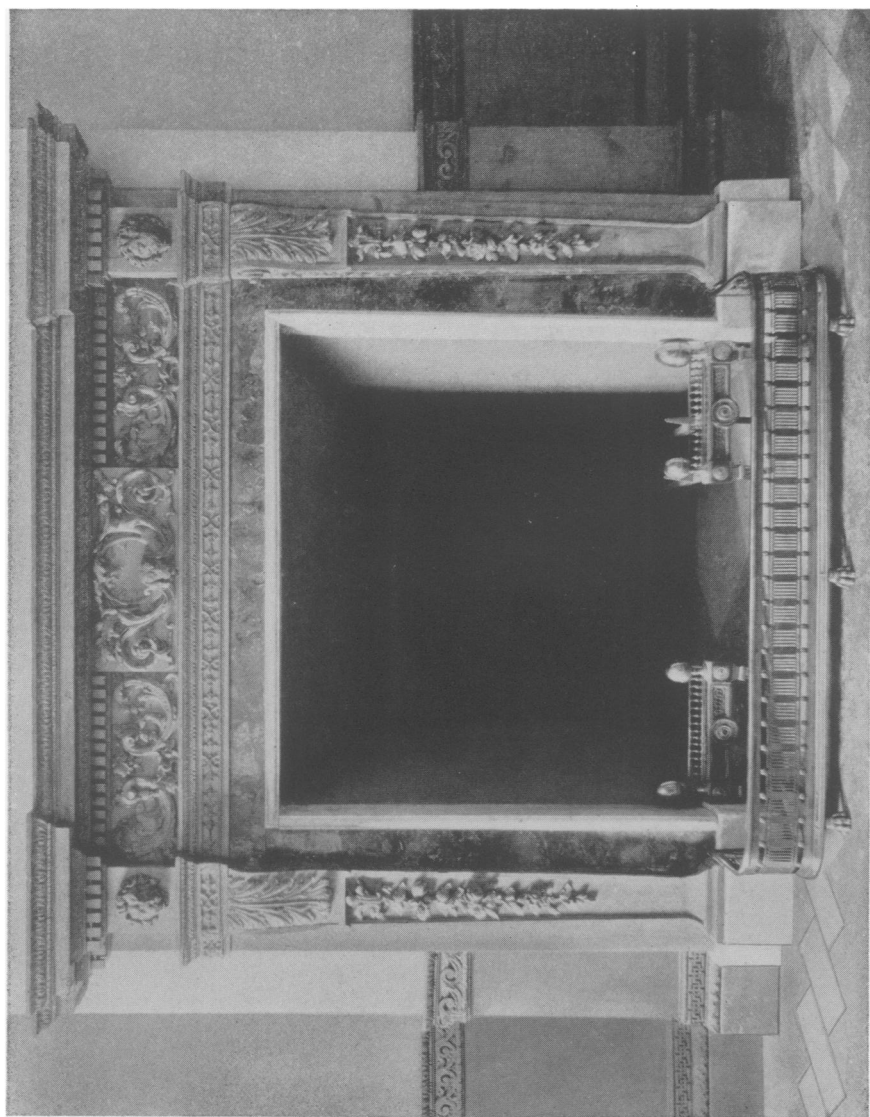
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The Georgian Room

IT MAY be safely said that the purchase and installation of the woodwork of the Georgian room marks one of the greatest advances the Museum has made in recent years. Overlooking, for the moment, the significance of the architectural details from the point of view of woodcarving and designing, emphasis should be laid upon the fact that the room forms the first of a series which, when complete, will be the ideal way to exhibit the paintings and furniture, the rugs and textiles, and the silver, china and glass of each particular period. The advantages of this mode of exhibiting are so manifest that they scarcely need here to be enlarged upon; the appeal of the objects themselves is increased, as a closely related historical group their educational value is many times multiplied, and they are given greater esthetic significance. It is hoped that by the time the Museum is prepared to move to its new building, more interiors, illustrating other types of European decoration, will have been added to the collections.

About the history of the present room all we know, unfortunately, is that it was taken from a house on Tower Hill, London. Built probably for the residence of some rich merchant of the eighteenth century, after a hundred and fifty years it became gradually less esteemed, until last year the house was dismantled and the woodwork of this room salvaged. We trust that further research which is in progress will reveal further historical facts about the house. In the meantime, however, it is possible to discover much of interest and importance from the architectural design and the technique of the woodcarving. The earliest probable date to which we can assign it is 1750, and in all likelihood it was built closer to the end of the decade of 1750-1760. It must be borne in mind that the traditions of Sir Christopher Wren, adopted in the early years of the Restoration and which had dominated for nearly a century the architecture and decoration of all England, were beginning to lack vigor and potency. The group of leading designers, such as Gibbs and Kent and Morris, failing to find an original mind among themselves, experienced a strange reversion to the style of Wren's predecessor, Inigo Jones, the great master architect of the early seventeenth century, who, through inspiration derived from the Italian Palladio, first set English architecture on a self-reliant and substantial base. It is interesting to note that scarcely any direct reversion has been accompanied by such marked success: the style developed by Inigo Jones, though snuffed out completely by the civil wars and lost in the confused years of the Restoration, yet after lying dormant over a century, possessed enough vitality to permit the architects of the middle Georgian period, men conscientious and industrious, but peculiarly unimaginative, to graft it on their withering traditions and by it to raise the standards of English decorative taste to a very high level.



FIREPLACE AND MANTLE OF NEW GEORGIAN ROOM

In the Museum's room the Palladian window, the treatment of the overdoor, details of the running borders of the wainscoting, the conventional and bold carving of the orders and the festoons on the mantle, all these are characteristic Georgian reflections of Inigo Jones' work. The friezes of the overdoor and the mantle are more reminiscent of the studied realism of the carvings of Grinling Gibbons, and this might quite naturally lead us to assign the work to the earlier and transitional period, say 1740. It is more reasonable, however, to suppose that, inasmuch as this room is not the pedigreed work of a well-known designer, it was probably made by some skillful builder who picked up his designs piecemeal from observation of work already completed, and for this reason was a little behind the times when he made this interior. This is one of the few justifiable criticisms of the room, that it seems to lack the spirit of individual creation.

In spite of this the workmanship is throughout excellent and the proportions satisfying. It is, roughly, eighteen by twenty-seven feet, and woodwork for all four sides is intact. One of the shorter walls is unbroken wainscoting; the one opposite this is broken by the jutting chimney breast containing the fireplace with jambs and architrave of antique Sienna marble, yellow and gray, the whole fireplace being framed by the richly carved mantle. It is probable that originally there was an overmantle similarly carved and containing a painting or a panel with a coat of arms. If so, this has since disappeared, and the absence of it is, indeed, scarcely felt. In this same wall, directly to the left of the fireplace, a doorway had been cut at a later date, and the piece of wainscoting, then removed, is missing; in installing the room this crude doorway was again walled up and the lost piece of woodwork has been restored in plaster.

The long wall to the right of the fireplace is broken by the doorway, originally the only entrance to the room. The jambs and architrave are bordered with deep moldings carved in conventional running patterns, and the latter is surmounted by a beautiful overdoor made up of a frieze carved with affronted dolphins supporting an urn in the center and scrolls of foliage on either side; over this frieze projects a cornice decorated again with conventional moldings and supported on large scroll brackets which flank the frieze and architrave on the doorway. We are fortunate in possessing the original door. Unlike the rest of the room, which is in pine wood, the door is a handsome piece of rich mahogany, an inch and a half thick, and it is divided into six panels. On the inside the edges of the panels are carved and the door again divided by a line of beading down the center.

The wall opposite the door, and to the left of the fireplace, contains the Palladian window in the center and the two simple windows in recesses on either side. The height of the Palladian window from the floor to the top of the curved member is eleven feet three inches,

and the height of the side windows of the Palladian is eight and a half feet from the floor, and these are flanked each by a pair of fluted columns with Doric capitals. The cornice which rested on these capitals and followed the curve of the central window are missing, but a proper restoration will be made. The two simple windows placed on either side of the Palladian are relatively plain; they are bordered, with jambs and architraves of carved moldings, but the jambs instead of running straight from the top to the wainscoting curve sharply outward at the base, a treatment commonly used by designers of this period. It was found necessary to leave out the panel of wainscoting in the recess of the left window in order to provide a second entrance to the room.

The wainscoting which surrounds the room on all sides to the height of two feet ten inches comprises two distinct members, the skirting and the chair rail. These are separated by plain pine boards. The skirting, set above a plain base-board, consists of an interesting band of fretwork, not unlike many of Chippendale's frets, set between two carved half-round moldings decorated with alternate leaves and flowers. The chair rail is more ornate, and in each unbroken section, the main border is treated as a unit and has a central ornament with right and left hand scrolls extending from this center in opposite directions to the end of the unit. Below this is a band of molding carved like that of the skirting and above an elaborated ball and dart motive, the balls being carved with alternate shells and roses.

Unlike the interiors of the time of Wren and Gibbons, when the artisans used unpainted oak and walnut, the fashion of the Georgian period demanded that the woodwork be painted. This accounts for the use of the cheaper pine wood, and in conceiving the original appearance of the room it must be remembered that the interior, now scraped clean to bring out the crispness of the carving, was painted olive-green or some other neutral tint, and probably gilded in places, especially on the mantle and overdoor. The walls were either paneled above the wainscoting or covered with dull figured damask or some textile of a neutral tone, on which hung the sconces which contained the candles that provided feeble illumination at night.

Among other paneled rooms of this same period attention should be directed to the one in the Victoria and Albert Museum, taken from Number 20 Hatton Garden, London. The style of this room is very similar to the one now installed in the Pennsylvania Museum, many of the moldings, as well as the treatment of the door and window jamb, bear a close resemblance. The Hatton Garden room is perhaps a little earlier, and the running moldings are carved with more care; the mantle and the overdoor friezes of our Tower Hill room, however, are of a fineness and crispness of execution that it would be difficult to equal even in comparison with the work of the most skillful artisans of the period.

H. H. F. J.